



Erykah Badu continues to be a light in a darkened industry...

GSS Review

Erykah Badu reintroduced and enticed Houston fans into her world as she returned to Houston on Saturday December 29 for a live intimate performance at the Houston Arena Theatre. The multi-Grammy award winning singer/songwriter, who is also a Dallas native previewed songs from her forthcoming cd and took her audience back through her road to stardom.

Jive's newest discovery, and recent Grammy nominee, Emily King opened the show with a soulful acoustic set by warming the audience with her talent. For those not familiar with her many were noticeably impressed with her songs and guitar skills King offered a great balance and alignment to Badu. King surprised the audience with giving away an autographed guitar. Local spoken word artist, Se7en gave a powerful performance further building anticipation for Erykah Badu.

Badu's band soothed the audience with a smooth up tempo instrumental simultaneously building the anticipation of her entrance. Badu hit the stage donned in a plaid suit with scarf and hat to match. She's one of the few people that could rock an outfit like that and make it fly. There were no intricate stage props or elaborate sets. Three stools for her background singers and two stands for her drum machine and Apple notebook were all she needed. After her first song she introduced herself to the audience, thanking the most high for her gift and in classic Badu fashion asked for permission to continue by the elders present.

During her introduction Badu referred to herself as, "an analog girl living in a digital world," This was certainly revelatory as throughout the show she frequently tapped out beats to the next song on her drum machine and shuffled through a play list on her notebook. She has certainly adjusted and embraced the digitized world and used it to her advantage and our benefit. From the start Badu gave us a preview of the songs to appear on her upcoming album. One song clearly expressed the influence that hip hop has had in our culture, as she chanted, "It's bigger than religion, It's bigger than our government, hip hop." Badu's wit and humor was reflective in Loretta Brown, a spirited song about a young woman trying to get noticed by men.

The second half of the show was full of audience interaction and participation. She took the audience back to her debut album with hits like Other Side of the Game, the remixed On & On, Woo and Tyrone. The guys in the audience really became spirited when Badu went into Danger and even slowed down a verse, H-town style.

She expressed her love for hip hop before going into her Grammy award winning Love of My Life. Playing with the audience she stopped in the middle of it saying she would give \$20 to anyone who could say the next words in the song, highlighting the lyric about a sample not clearing. Revealing that she is a true hip hop head she tapped out beats to Afrika Bambata's, Planet Rock and got the crowd to rap along with her during verses of Ice Cube, Whodini's, Friends and Doug E. Fresh's La Di Da Di.

Badu was having a great time with the audience as she confessed that when other young girls use to pray for long hair and big breasts she prayed to be funky. She slowed it down with her touching lullaby, Yeyo. Badu noted that her music is therapy and thanked the crowd for allowing her to use it as an outlet. She explained that she has grown since her first album and although she use to wear head wraps, ankh's and burn incense, that's still apart of who she is inside. She continued to give the audience her signature soulful, passionate and retrospective tunes until time constraints forced her to conclude. After leaving the stage she still came back and did what she referred to as one of her favorite songs, closing with Didn't Cha Know.

There is a small group of artists who have had careers that span ten years and beyond. Badu has truly learned from these greats by continuing to bare her soul and offering fans much needed doses of sincerity, and making us remember that purity and hope in music, which can unite and inspire us. Erykah Badu continues to prove that she's in a class by herself and we can only hope that she will continue to remember Houston when she decides to indulge her fans with another concert.